

THE MUSIC ISSUE

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

September 2003

Girlfriends

special
**MUSIC
ISSUE**

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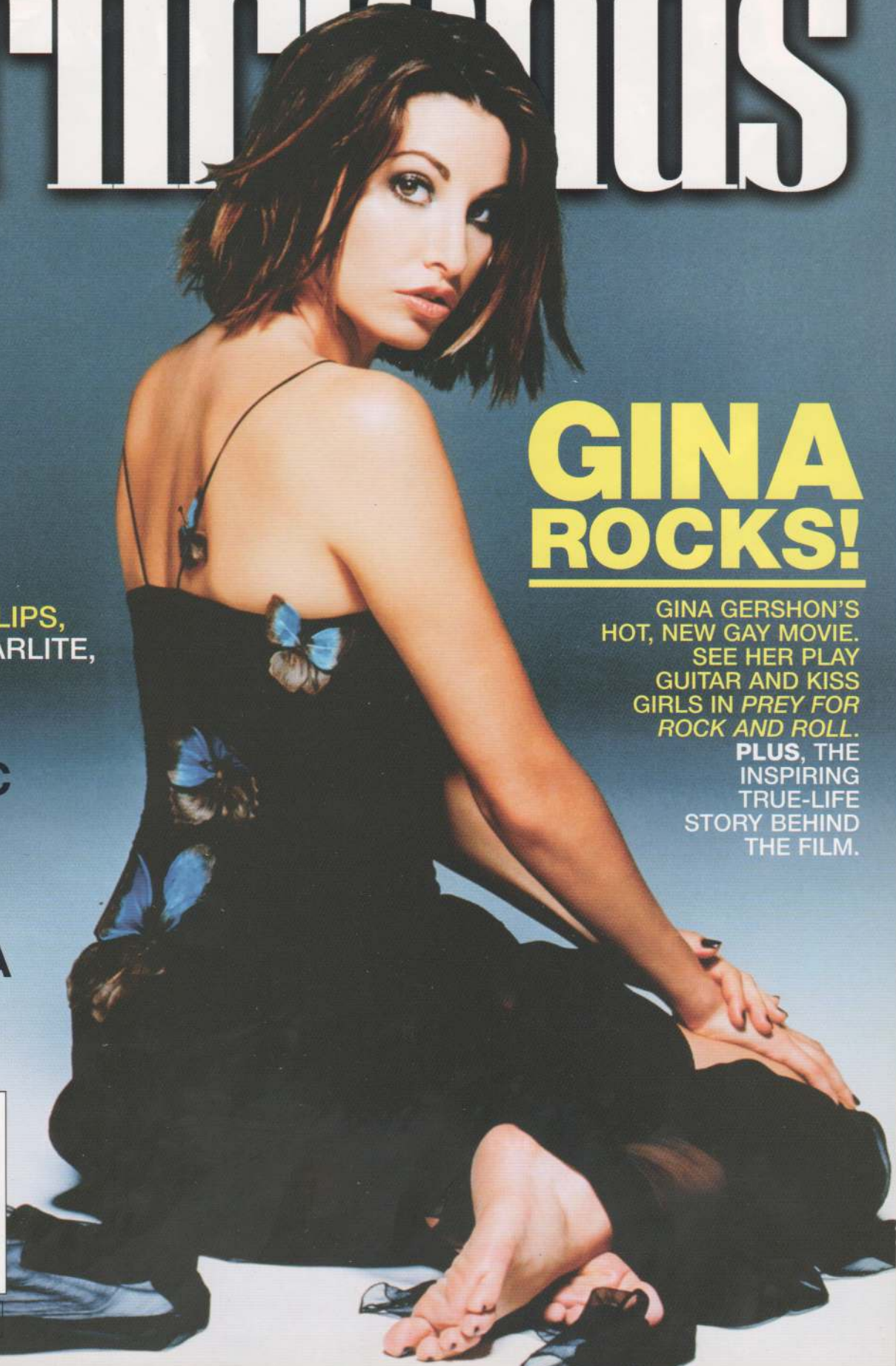
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She Will Rock You

Gina Gershon's tattooed sex appeal carries this dyke-themed rock musical.

by Candace Moore

Gina Gershon has an immutable hotness, sort of like the molten lava bubbling under the earth's crust. She would maintain her wistful sex appeal even if she were restrained by padlocked chains and pitched into the Arctic Ocean. Luckily for us, in *Prey for Rock and Roll*, the lippy darling of the Wachowski Brothers' 1996 lesbian hard boil, *Bound*, continues to seduce, this time by strutting around in leather and showing off her tats.

In fact, Gershon got to design her character Jacki's tattoos (which include arm-swarms of hummingbirds, tribal swirls, and a magnificently scripted *FUCK*) as well as lay

down her own vocal tracks for this music-driven, independent feature. Based on the autobiographical play by Cheri Lovedog, *Prey for Rock and Roll* focuses on a bisexual, forty-year-old rocker chick stuck in an adolescent dream of becoming a rock star.

In her own heyday in the late eighties, Lovedog fronted a grrl-powered band called Lovedog, playing opening gigs for big-ticket alterna groups like X and Jane's Addiction. But she never moved up the billing. Similarly, the members of Clam Dandy, the film's thinly fictionalized all-girl punk rock group, are anxious to score the sweet record deal that will finally rocket them into amphitheatres.

Jacki is the band's bitter ringleader. Tossing a multi-layered mane of shaggy, shoulder-length hair fashioned

after Patti Smith or old school Joan Jett, she lugs equipment out to the curb with the swaggering lackluster of a worn professional. Her fellow bandmates-in-purgatory include trust-fund druggie bassist Tracy (Drea de Matteo of *The Sopranos*) and cheek-pinchingly cute lesbian lovebirds Sally (Shelly Cole) on drums and Faith (Lori Petty) on lead guitar.

Sally and Faith tease that Jacki is a "lady who can't make up her mind" (meaning which gender she prefers in the sack), but it's Jacki's preoccupation with all things rock that screws up her love life. After her sexy girlfriend waves a vibrator in the air, inquiring, "Shall I start without you?" Jacki tosses the toy and pushes her lady back for some ravenous heavy petting. But when the phone rings and it's Rockstar Incarnate's agent, she leaves her pissed-off partner for a celebratory kung fu session in front of the bathroom mirror. Jacki's obsession with "making-it" practically leaves her impotent.

After twenty-plus years of fixation and band practice, Jacki is threatening to throw in the towel. Nevertheless, the part-time tattoo artist has staying power as far as kicking up the jams goes. Bic-lit encores and body-inking keep the singer's life—otherwise crammed with drug addicts, rapists, and jailbirds—making sense.

First-time director Alex Steyermark takes care to reproduce the topography of Los Angeles's pre-grunge period, even though the film is set in the present day. Filming recognizable scraps of L.A.'s Silverlake, Hollywood, and downtown areas, he shows us a streetlamp-lit nightlife brimming with smack dealers and littered with beer cans and wind-blown plastic bags.

The veteran music producer behind transgender glam-opera *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Steyermark head-butts his way into the directorial slam pit with sneering punk energy. Raw, loud, proud L7-inspired rock, belabored plotting, intimate camera work, and a drive for authenticity all seem to mark this as a first work that worked up a sweat.



Gina Gershon parties hard and rocks harder onscreen

It's the fresh energy of *Prey* that saves its somewhat sophomoric structure. Plot points seem set to a shock-factor seismograph, or maybe that's just what life is like for hunted animals like these characters. Whenever they start to flesh out and engage, something drastic happens. The result would be melodramatic gluttony if the film's flavor, natural dialogue, and superb cast didn't carry it. Grade: **B**

Candace Moore recently co-edited *Revolutions of the Mind*.

Prey for Rock and Roll

dir. Alex Steyermark
MAC Releasing, 104 min.

Music to Make Love To

Queer DVDs center love stories around music.

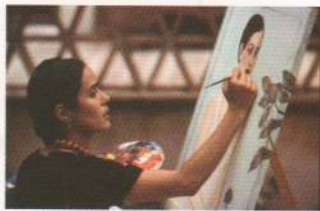
by **Candace Moore**

It won "best original score" at the

Oscars for Elliot Goldenthal's sparkling, rumbling soundtrack, but *Frida* titillates all the senses. Director Julie Taymor (who directed the odd but pretty *Titus*) strings animations of Mexican painter

Frida Kahlo's striking, self-reflexive imagery through this biopic like strong weave. The movie has you smelling tequila, lime, cactus, and two women in the heat of sex. There's a slowly executed, fingertip-

kissed tango between Salma Hayek (who plays up the bisexual artist's girl-hunting gaze) and Ashley Judd, and the DVD includes an interview with lesbian *canción ranchera* singer Chavela Vargas, one of Frida's real-life lovers. Grade: **A**



Julie Taymor weaves art, sex, and music into *Frida*.

Frida

dir. Julie Taymor
Miramax, 123 min.

Absolute Beginners (MGM, 1986)

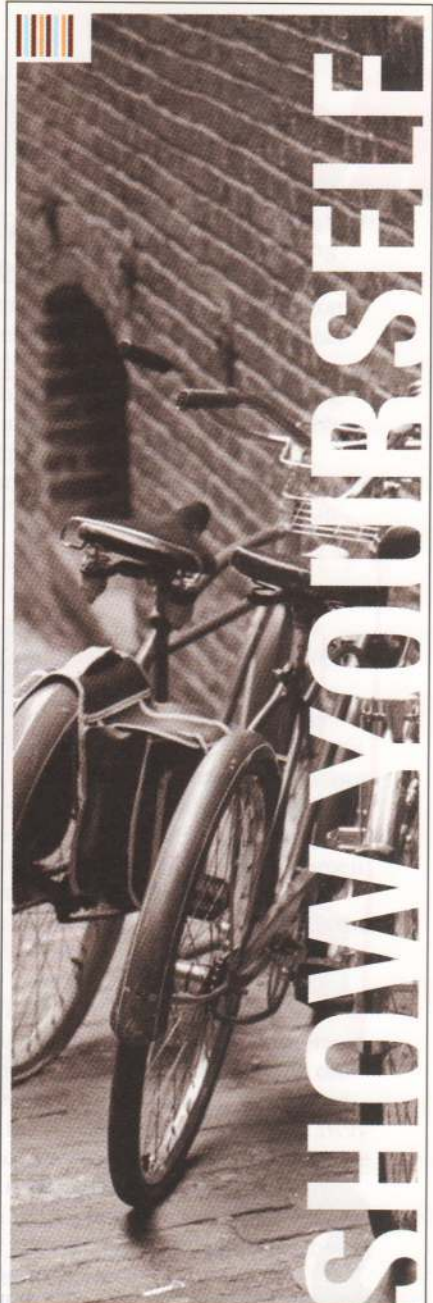
"Every class, every income, every kink, boys, girls, black, white, yellow, bent, versatile—all on equal terms...." So nineteen-year-old Colin (Eddie O'Connell) idealistically describes his beatnik Notting Hill district. It's 1958 and postwar London's hopping with plucky, spiffily dressed teenagers, jazz hipsters, slick shysters, wry sex workers, and a cackling dyke named Big Jill. Everyone's having a blast and cauterwauling into song; that is, until the city breaks out in race riots. Director Julien Temple (rockumentor of the Sex Pistol's *Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*) wrought together a punchy, new wave precursor to *Moulin Rouge*; a musical that doubles as surrealistic epic. Grade: **B**

All Over Me (Fine Line Features, 1997)

But I'm a Cheerleader meets *Kids*—in the sense that this film about an aspiring guitarist growing up in New York's Hell's Kitchen is full of sweet first-time girl-girl love and gritty, scary reality. Claude, short for Claudia (Allison Folland), is crushed out on her short-skirted, twizzle-stick of a druggie best friend, who tortures Claude with more-than-best-friendly affection but is smitten with cocky Eminem-ringer hoodlum Mark (Cole Hauser). Luckily, a local girl-bandster, Lucy (Leisha Hailey of the Murmurs) takes her time with Claude, letting her flip out to Patti Smith while teaching her how to kiss. Truly one of the best domestic lesbian films, with an outstanding soundtrack featuring Sleater-Kinney and Helium. Grade: **A**

Sophie B. Hawkins: The Cream Will Rise (New Video, 2002)

One moment the camera's toted along on the road with omnisexual (she claims she coined the term) diva Sophie B. Hawkins. The next it's catching Hawkins and her mummy play-fighting as they split hairs over the singer-songwriter's childhood sexual abuse. Hawkins, who perked up lesbian ears in 1992 with the hit song "Damn, I Wish I Was Your Lover," describes how her smashed mother would bribe her with promises of a football uniform to sit on grown men's laps nude. As nauseating and compelling as a freeway accident, Hawkins' spill-all seems manipulated by documentary filmmaker Gigi Gaston, who even Hawkins gets sick of. Despite gossipy digging, Hawkins' passionate music, her brazen New York wit, and her strange brand of hyper-sexuality flatter her. Grade: **C+**



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PETER SOREL

Heads in the Stars

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Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief



Celestial sandwich: Me in the middle, with our new astrologers Jessica Lanyadoo (l) and Michelle Tea (r)

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